

Mullica Watershed Planning Project Steering Committee Meeting: 8/15/01
The Richard Stockton College of NJ, Room N115
Meeting Summary

Welcome/Introductions

Prior to the Steering Committee meeting, Larry Liggett (NJ Pinelands Commission) gave an overview presentation on the Pinelands region and the Comprehensive Management Plan. Annette Barbaccia (Executive Director, NJ Pinelands Commission) began the main meeting by highlighting the agenda items and thanking Steering Committee members for giving their time to the project. Committee members were then asked to introduce themselves (attendee list attached), after which Kim Beidler (NJ Pinelands Commission) gave a presentation on the Mullica watershed and the overall watershed planning process.

Committee Administration and Operation / Ground Rules

Annette Barbaccia discussed the purpose of the ground rules. Larry Liggett noted the importance of #5 (decisionmaking by consensus where possible). Kim Beidler mentioned that 3 to 4 Steering Committee meetings/per year are currently anticipated. No substantive recommendations were made to revise the draft, and the Committee reached consensus to follow the ground rules as proposed.

Development of Vision Statement

Chris Krupka (Watershed Coordinator, Pinelands Commission) talked about the purpose and background for developing the draft vision statement; sources include public input, underlying planning concepts and regulations, and examples from other watersheds. She emphasized that the visioning process is ongoing and evolving. Steve Jacobus (NJ DEP) noted that the trend over time has been for watershed vision statements to move away from specific goals and objectives toward more broadly worded statements (Whippany was one of the first, later Barnegat Bay and most recently Manasquan and Monmouth County).

The discussion was then opened up to comments from the Steering Committee. Key areas of agreement among committee members that emerged during the discussion were:

- Create a short vision statement with a separate listing of principles, goals and/or objectives (need to clearly distinguish)
- Better capture the unique character of the watershed (e.g., refer to Pinelands, bay, largely pristine environment, etc.)

Other comments were as follows:

- The goal of the vision statement is not to bring new people in, but to unite the group and be everyone's vision
- Delete the word "resources" after "water" and "natural" in the draft statement

- Incorporate the words “high quality habitats”
- In the “principles” list, the term “smart growth” could be changed or further defined
- We must work within the existing regulations, but may recommend changes
- Re-word the last bullet in the “principles” list to read, “close cooperation with and among local and state governments”

Input from members of the public was then requested. One comment was made:

- The first bullet point uses the words “preserve, protect and enhance” (from Pinelands CMP)—the same language should be used in the second point

Following the discussion, the Committee agreed on the next steps:

- revise vision statement and create separate list of goals/principles
- get feedback from Steering committee on revised vision statement
- post revised draft vision statement on website
- present revised draft vision statement at general public meeting in the fall; request further public input

Preliminary Identification of Issues for Technical Focus Groups

Kim Beidler described the purpose of technical focus groups (TFGs) and the bases for the recommendations to be discussed. Rich Federman (NJ Pinelands Commission) and Kim Beidler presented a brief summary of the 7 proposed TFGs. Other topics were considered for TFGs, but deferred for now due to their specificity, probable consideration by other TFGs, and/or broad scope; these include mining, water quality and nonpoint sources. Nomination forms for experts to serve on TFGs were distributed to Steering Committee members.

Several Committee members agreed that it may be useful either now or in the future to establish subcommittees or otherwise track issues that overlap two or more TFGs (e.g., nonpoint sources, agricultural water supply, etc.). Other comments on the proposed TFGs were as follows (unless otherwise indicated, all comments were made by Steering Committee members; clarifications noted in parentheses where appropriate):

Sustainable Development TFG

- In addition to research going on in the upper Mullica, there is extensive water quality and other research going on in the lower river and bay areas; this data should be shared

Biodiversity/Habitat Preservation TFG

- What is the goal of this TFG (e.g., habitat to be preserved)? (**Annette Barbaccia responded that the Pinelands Commission has an interest in identifying critical habitats to guide planning decisions, and that this TFG might focus on this issue.** Larry Liggett noted that the TFG might also recommend additions to the Pinelands Commission’s list of future target acquisition areas and proposals to link preserved areas. Adriana Calle added that NJ DEP has funds available for land acquisition targets, which is a contract deliverable.)

- The impacts of recreational watercraft on fish populations and habitat should be examined
- Are we considering biodiversity for its own sake or as it relates to water quality? (Steve Jacobus responded that while water quality does affect biodiversity, the watershed project is also broader in scope than water quality alone.)
- Are vernal ponds disappearing in the Mullica? (The NJ Div. of Fish & Wildlife is examining this issue statewide.)
- Public comment: forestry and related wildfire issues are also important in the first 3 TFGs (sustainable development, biodiversity/habitat preservation and water supply); this topic might require its own TFG

Water Supply TFG

- It is important to look at impacts on headwaters streams, which are typically impacted first by water diversions and interbasin transfers

Agriculture TFG

- This TFG might also include water-based agriculture, e.g. the clamming industry
- Native plant harvesting (e.g., cattail collection for the florist trade) may have some impact
- We may want to consider water supply as it relates to agricultural water usage; efficient irrigation methods are increasingly being used, but not yet everywhere
- Lawns are also a major issue in terms of water quality and nonpoint source pollution

Septic Systems TFG

- The Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve has access to a “septic education kit” for use in education/outreach; NJ DEP also has a few booklets on the subject.
- **Has the nitrate dilution model used by the Pinelands Commission to guide planning and zoning been validated or improved upon since it was first developed?** Pinelands Commission data shows degradation in the streams where extensive development exists, but do we know if distance from the streams affects the relative contribution of the source? (Annette Barbaccia responded that this issue will be part of the USGS Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer study, and that the Pinelands Commission ad hoc septic committee report recommends examining the nitrate dilution model over the next few years. Larry Liggett added that septic system impacts may be long-term; in some cases, the sources of current impacts no longer exist.)
- How do the septic rules that were put out in March affect the Pinelands? (Annette Barbaccia and Steve Jacobus responded that the NJ DEP and the Pinelands Commission are working together to ensure that their respective septic regulations are compatible.)

Recreation TFG

- No comments

Point Sources TFG

- Since point sources already fall under a permitting system (e.g., NJPDES), what would this

TFG do beyond that? (Annette Barbaccia responded that this TFG would not replicate the DEP program, but might examine impacts of overlooked potential sources (e.g. abandoned industrial sites) and make recommendations to DEP. Adriana Calle (NJ DEP) and Steve Jacobus added that Action Now project proposals could focus on restoration of abandoned sites or obtaining funding for capping old landfills.)

- What kind of impact do military bases have? (Larry Liggett noted that the three major facilities are outside the watershed; the Warren Grove Bombing Range and a small portion of the FAA Technical Center are in the watershed.)

Gina Berg (Burlington County Office of Land Use) suggested that one additional topic might be stormwater. Rich Bizub (Pinelands Preservation Alliance) questioned whether an overall water quality TFG isn't needed to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks. Jamie Cromartie (Richard Stockton College of NJ) suggested that all TFG members should think of water quality as an organizing principle for their groups. **Adriana Calle noted that the project contract gives TFGs the responsibility of separating perceived issues from actual issues.**

Annette Barbaccia requested that Pinelands Commission staff examine the proposed TFGs to ensure all issues raised by Committee members are addressed. Committee members were then asked to serve as liaisons to specific TFGs. Interest was indicated by the following people:

- Sustainable Development: Tim Kernan (Builders' League of South Jersey)
- Habitat Preservation/Biodiversity: Dave Golden (NJ DEP), Jamie Cromartie (Stockton College)
- Agriculture: Bill Cutts (Pinelands Agricultural Advisory Committee)
- Septic Systems: Rich Bethea (Pinelands Municipal Council), Tim Kernan
- Recreation: (none; Peggy Sooy (Pine Barrens Canoe & Kayak Rental) was suggested)
- Water Supply: Rich Bizub (Pinelands Preservation Alliance)
- Point Sources: (none)

Next Steps and Overall Schedule

Chris Krupka distributed a schedule of planned watershed activities through December 2001. Pinelands Commission staff agreed to send out a summary of the meeting to all Steering Committee members and post it on the website. A public meeting is planned for the fall.